

# Fort Hood Family Housing: On the Grow

*FHFH partners hard at work building new homes, renovating existing ones.*

BY ED VEIGA

After only 16 months of operations, Fort Hood Family Housing LP (FHFH) has delivered another impressive round of high quality new and renovated homes and community improvements to the 24,000 military families living in this Central Texas community.

Since their October 2001 start date, the FHFH partners, the U.S. Army and Actus Lend Lease LLC, have been hard at work building new homes, revitalizing and renovating existing homes, upgrading and adding community amenities, and landscaping common areas. Every one of the installation's 13 villages has benefited from the improvements.

In mid-February, even as soldiers from the Army's 4th Infantry Division and other Fort Hood units were deploying in support of military operations in the Middle East, families were being introduced to the first of 224 new homes, located in Fort Hood's Kouma Village. Great homes and communities for waiting families are a primary motivation for the Residential Communities Initiative, and fulfilling the promise is a great encouragement for deploying soldiers.

## Quality Growth at Every Turn

Since August of 2002, over 60 families have moved into newly constructed, four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath homes averaging 1,750 square feet. Specifically in response to the Army's most pressing needs at Fort Hood, 974 of those new homes, which are designed for junior



NCO (E4-E6) families, will be built in the development's first five years.

And the speed of progress continues to escalate. In March, new homes were coming on line at the rate of 40 a month; by early summer, major conversions will be available at the rate of 12 a month, and renovations will greet families at the rate of 28 a month.

Kouma Village, with an excellent elementary school and child-care center located within easy walking distance of

the homes, provides a wonderful template for community development. The village also includes a "Central Park" and age-specific playgrounds, providing a focal point for family and neighborhood gatherings.

The FHFH partnership also has worked closely with the Army & Air Force Exchange Service to carefully locate a new retail facility within the community area to serve residents by providing a convenience store within





*FAR LEFT: Girls on the playground; TOP: Fort Hood Family Housing employees gather to show their support for Fort Hood soldiers getting ready to deploy; ABOVE LEFT: Kouma Kitchen; ABOVE RIGHT: Kouma Living Room.*

walking distance of most homes.

Another major plus for Kouma Village is the new community center, which is currently under construction. That facility, which is tailored to the community it serves, will provide recreation areas, meeting rooms, computer facilities, and a swimming pool. A key feature in Kouma Village is a new facility, built next to the community center by FHH in a unique partnership with Head Start, that will provide a high-quality

classroom environment for Head Start programs, adding yet another critical service for community residents.

#### **Improvements Abound**

Senior NCOs are finding great four-to-five-bedroom homes in an innovative project that is converting 640 two-story stacked apartments into 1,950-square-foot town homes. Those homes not only will provide flexible space and privacy for growing families but will reduce by

half the density of families in the crowded 1970s community and is projected to reduce the density of cars by 600.

More than 100 additional families are enjoying the results of a revitalization project that was taken on by FHH only a few weeks after operations began. The McNair Village two-bedroom town homes offer junior-grade couples and small families an additional "bonus" room in addition to privacy-fenced yards and "town center" living.



The improvements have greatly enhanced the popularity of the village, which is located within walking distance of childcare, retail, swimming, and running tracks. The site is also the midpoint of all of the installation's major work areas, providing an easy commute for the junior-grade soldiers who live there.

### Resident Services Are the Priority

The FHH partners understand that great resident services provide the long-term success for privatization projects. New homes and amenities are a priority, but taking care of residents, regardless of the age of their homes, is the most important aspect of daily life.

The Army/Lend Lease Residential teams have blended to provide seamless service for families from arrival until departure. The property management

approach offers personal service, including model homes designed to introduce residents to their new homes and residential services coordinators who guide families from move-in to move-out, while providing programs and services throughout their stay.

Twenty-four hour maintenance services are a demanding mission given the huge inventory and widespread age of homes. But the maintenance and the resident services teams are receiving near-perfect ratings from the residents, who are surveyed at every contact. In fact, recent Department of the Army surveys rate key resident services at Fort Hood among the very highest in the Army.

### A Trained and Deployable Force

One of the FHH Property Management (PM) team's priorities has been

planning and preparing for the operational deployment of soldiers/ sponsors.

Housing briefings are an important part of every pre-deployment briefing for soldiers and their families. PM teams have been advising families on how to best meet their housing needs, whether on- or off-post. Those teams have also been preparing for contingencies and planning additional family care programs beyond the usual community programs currently in place.

Careful coordination with installation agencies and support groups means that resident services teams are ready to support existing programs and fill in the gaps for resident families.

### Making Low BAH Work

One of the greatest challenges for the FHH project from the beginning was

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making a low Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) work. During the Community Development and Management Plan (CDMP) phase, the Army/Actus team realized that careful planning and prudent execution would be essential.

Conservative estimates resulted in a balanced plan that provided high quality homes and amenities while meeting the Army's deficit and market needs. That approach gained added momentum through careful and measured operational execution, resulting in many savings through competitive bidding and other business efficiencies.

While there were great hopes and expectations for gains under the "zero out-of-pocket BAH" initiative, meticulous work by the Army Housing Office and the Actus Partners has worked effectively toward meeting those expecta-

tions, netting the project significant gains, which are an accurate reflection of the rapidly developing market in the Greater Fort Hood area.

Significant BAH gains are amplifying the results of conservative planning, which was originally based on very low BAH rates. The benefit goes to the project and soldiers, as validated by a recent (June 2002) GAO study that cited the Fort Hood project for ensuring that BAH gains were returned to the project, not the developer.

### The Road Ahead

Overwhelming positive response by residents to the quality of construction projects and residential services has validated the FHH approach to a successful RCI solution at Fort Hood. The project remains ahead of schedule and is main-

taining positive variances in all critical areas.

The project is steadily increasing both scope and intensity for out-year programs as well. Homes that previously might have netted revitalizations are being upgraded to major renovations, and new homes likely now will replace homes that were originally going to remain in place for longer periods.

Financial viability, flexibility, and a shared passion for providing soldiers and their families with exceptional homes and communities are fueling the success for Fort Hood Family Housing, the Army's template for RCI. ■

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